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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: UK AMBASSADOR PROPOSES MEDIATION FOR IRAQ'S
CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW, OTHER KEY ISSUES

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) British Ambassador to Iraq Dominic Asquith described May 23 to the Ambassador and Commanding General (CG) a plan to prod Iraq's national party leaders to agree to a joint vision and set of principles. Iraqi leaders would then translate their agreement into a public declaration with a credible implementation and monitoring mechanism. In Asquith's view, a direct approach to party leaders seeking this over-arching political decision would "scatter the horses," and so he recommended instead that the UK and US governments insert an independent international mediator to help the Presidency Council or Policy Council on National Security (PCNS) to "midwife" a consensus-building process on constitutional amendments. Meeting initially just to build confidence and personal understanding, Asquith argued, would draw Iraqi leaders "into the lobster pot," which then would allow for substantive discussions on constitutional review. At the end of the negotiating process, the PCNS could publicly declare consensus on the constitutional amendments. Ideally, just before Iraqi leaders would make this declaration, the US, UK and their international advisor could persuade them to take the process one step further by "pulling the strands together" into a political consensus on a range of issues that fall outside the constitution but prove integral to Iraq's stability. Asquith said he believed this plan could overcome a challenge inherent in the current process of securing agreement issue-by-issue, which often excludes some parties from the negotiations and creates an appearance that "side deals" are merely "plunked" on the PCNS. Asquith said his plan would engage all of the major parties, and thereby invest them in the broader political process.

¶2. (S) The Ambassador acknowledged the value of achieving top-level consensus on the central issues, and of strengthening the institutional processes required to attain this consensus. However, the Government of Iraq (GOI) must move quickly now, and Asquith's plan seems elaborate, complex and time-consuming. The more frequent meetings of the PCNS are positive and should be encouraged, but the PCNS cannot at present serve as a mechanism to achieve progress on crucial issues; conversely, it could actually cause delay because it currently lacks three key leaders -- Masood Barzani, Abdulaziz Al-Hakim, and Jalal Talabani. The Ambassador argued that by reaching agreement on pressing issues one-by-one, such as the hydrocarbons law or de-Baathification, the GOI can build significant forward momentum. Moreover, the coalition must address some issues, such as those affecting the Kurds, directly with individual parties, instead of through a broader grouping or one particular framework. The Ambassador also averred that many other issues, including a constitutional referendum, require the input of too many parties to be construed as "side deals."

¶3. (S) The CG said that while a political statement of agreement may have value, the coalition must focus now on

substance. It has proven difficult to urge movement from the GOI on practical concerns, let alone politically charged issues like new legislation. Thus it does not make sense now to spend political capital producing a joint declaration which the coalition could better spend simply brokering agreement topic-by-topic. Asquith's plan, the CG asserted, does not appear realistically attainable.

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